

Introductory

This text has parallels in Matthew (24:29ff) and Mark (13:24ff.). It is the text appointed to be read on Advent 2 in the TLH one-year lectionary. Matthew and Mark readings from this section are appointed – The Triumphal Entry is the first selection – on Advent 1 in years A and B in LW, and they are appointed in LSB as alternatives on those same Sundays.

The Triumphal Entry from Luke is actually the appointed text for this Sunday, and this text is the alternative. Is it that the people who decide these things are moving towards more Triumphal Entry or are they getting away from readings like this about the End Times. I can't get into those lectionary peoples' heads, but I don't like the direction this is headed.

People don't think about things like death and the end of the world. It's one of the reasons why people don't come to funerals like they used to; funerals force them to think about death. They also have to hear the LSB funeral service make it abundantly and redundantly clear that the deceased is in heaven, and if you want to be there you need to be a believer.

The Advent Season forces us all to take four Sundays out of the year to talk about the end of all things, and it's more like a couple and the Last Sunday of the Church Year. We are forced to listen to Jesus talk to us about staying awake and being ready for His Second Coming and to be reminded that the event is imminent! Where else do they hear that?

What we have here is a continuation of the answer to the question posed to Jesus about the End Times; the timing and the "signs" to look for to know when the time is drawing near. He begins with a warning, then articulates normal things that happen all the time, then the destruction of Jerusalem, back to normal things that happen all the time, and a warning.

Textual Notes

25. Jesus continues, "Καὶ ἔσονται σημεῖα ἐν ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ ἄστροις – and there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars." Earlier (7), He had been asked about "signs" of the coming apocalypse. He had answered firstly by saying that signs will be seen in what we might call normal events; wars, earthquakes, persecutions, things we see all the time.

The word “σημεῖα – signs” is a common NT word, commonly used to refer to supernatural, often miraculous occurrences which are almost always observable to beholders of them. That’s what they’re looking for, but there’s nothing supernatural or miraculous about those normal events. Those things are occurring around the world even as Jesus speaks of them.

Then, in the future, they will see war coming specifically to Judea and to Jerusalem. The events described by Jesus (20-24) are Rome’s sacking of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple (70 A.D.). It was at that time, in fact, that the Jews largely abandoned the Holy Land, leaving the battlefield to the Gentiles, only to return in the twentieth century.

Regarding the planetary occurrences, Matthew and Mark specifically say that “ἔσονται σημεῖα ἐν ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ ἀστροῖς – there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars.” Unlike the “normal” things He mentions – as noted above – these events will be out of the ordinary – supernatural – and in fact they will be things that have never been seen before.

Those things will be seen in the sky, and there will also be supernatural things happening on Planet Earth, “καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς συνοχὴ ἐθνῶν ἐν ἀπορίᾳ ἤχους θαλάσσης καὶ σάλου – and upon the earth anxiety of nations with perplexity, a rolling of the sea and the waves.” The word used to describe the condition of nations, “συνοχή” occurs only twice in the NT.

The other time is in 2 Corinthians 2:4, when Paul uses it to talk about his own condition as he wrote a letter to the Corinthians. In the secular usage it seems to mean the kind of stress that comes from not being able to do anything about a thing. People who seem to know about these things will tell you that impotence in a situation causes a great deal of stress.

It’s the kind of stress that comes from seeing the end coming, knowing for a fact that the end is here, and not being able to do anything about it. It will be an especially stressful time for people who have rejected the Savior and who are shortly headed for hell. The meaning of the “gnashing of teeth” is the person who knew better but did not do it anyway.

The other word used to describe “the nations” is “ἀπορία.” It’s a hapax (logomena, it appears only once) in the NT, but cognates make several appearances. It may be the strongest word in the Greek language – and there are several – to describe the utter inability to comprehend what is going on here, like when you have a bad dream, only you wake up.

There seems to be scholarly debate about whether we’re talking about observable planetary phenomena, or whether these words are to be taken figuratively. Most of the commentators at biblehub.com think this is figurative language, and they lean heavily on the fact that this is apocalyptic writing, and that sort of writing includes a lot of that kind of language.

Bengel correctly says,

The language is to be taken literally (not figuratively): because the earth, sea, and heaven (sky), are distinctly enumerated. [Those things (objects in nature) which are made mention of in the first days of Creation, are here set down in an inverted order: 1. The sun and the moon with the stars; 2. The earth and the sea; 3. The heaven.

Benson goes a different direction, saying,

These seem to be highly figurative expressions, signifying the decaying of all the glory, excellence, and prosperity of the nation; and the prevalence of universal sadness, misery, and confusion

Barnes cites a plethora of OT writings that sound very similar,

Isaiah 13: 10, The stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

The Prophet Ezekiel describes in similar terms the destruction coming on Egypt, Ezekiel 32: 7-8, When I shall put thee out I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light.

The Prophet Daniel also uses similar language, when speaking of the slaughter of the Jews by the little horn, meaning probably Antiochus Epiphanes: And it waxed great even unto the host of heaven; and cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them. And lastly, God, by Joel, foretelling this very same destruction of Jerusalem,

Joel 2: 30-31, says, I will show wonders in heaven and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood.

Gill talks about how the Rabbis would look at these things, in a figurative way;

By the "sun" they understand the kingdom of the house of David; by "the light", the law; by "the moon", the sanhedrim; and by the stars, the Rabbins; and the same seem to be designed by the stars here:

I was not surprised to find that the Rabbis had a lot to say about these things, and a lot of it wrong. I must say that I was rather surprised to find that some actual Bible scholars think

that these words are figurative, when clearly, they are not. The stress and perplexity are depicted and will be real because the events that will cause them are really going to happen.

26. Besides stress and perplexity, those actual events will cause in man “ἀποψυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ φόβου καὶ προσδοκίας τῶν ἐπερχομένων τῇ οἰκουμένῃ - fainting men from fear and expectation of what is coming to the inhabited earth.” The word “ἀποψυχόντων – fainting” is a hapax in the NT, and it means to “take breath away” and these events will.

There’s a reason for their fainting and fear, “αἱ γὰρ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται – for the powers of the heavens will be shaken,” not stirred. All that has held together Creation, particularly the Laws of Nature, will on this day be upended. Things that always have been since the beginning will be no more, to be replaced by the new and different.

27. About that time, “καὶ τότε ὄψονται τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλῃ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς – and then they will see the Son of God coming in the clouds with power and great glory.” The word for “see” means both to perceive and to understand with your brain the meaning of what you are seeing with your eyes. All will see it.

For the unbeliever, this will be a horrible time. It will be especially distressing for those who have been exposed to the Christian faith and who have rejected it. It will be worst for those who had been Baptized Christians and had at some point apostatized from the Faith. They will be the ones who will be weeping the loudest and gnashing the hardest.

28. He now retraces His steps back to the beginning, back to “nation will rise against nation (10)m and tells the Christians, “ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι ἀνακύψατε καὶ ἐπάρατε τὰς κεφαλὰς ὑμῶν – these things beginning to come to pass, lift up your heads.” It being the case that those things have begun, we should do that now, look to God in heaven.

The lifting up of the head is a positive thing. Nick, my former personal trainer, told me to always keep my head up when working out, and I do. It both indicates and inspires positive thoughts and feelings, and I know that talk like that makes you uncomfortable. Didn’t your mom or your coach ever tell you to keep your head up? That’s where we find God.

For the Christian, the reason for doing that is “διότι ἐγγίζει ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις ὑμῶν – because your redemption draws near.” The conjunction “because” is an uncommon compound of διά and τοῦτο. Here, it means that this is the specific thing that would cause you to keep your head up, and that when everything else seems to be lost, you are not, but are saved.

29 – 30. Now He tells a story, commonly known as the Parable of the Fig Tree. He talks about the Fig tree “καὶ πάντα τὰ δένδρα – and all the trees.” What He says is common to all trees, especially to fruit trees, and will be familiar to many of your hearers. Last week, when Jesus talked about the fig tree, I said that I don’t know anything about fig trees.

The fig tree will not grow in Zone 5, and they all know what that means. I finally said that maybe we can learn from an apple or cherry tree – they do grow in Zone 5 – the same lesson taught by the fig tree. We also have peach, pear, and chestnut trees. Jesus gives us this good, short parable using a familiar earthly concept to teach a heavenly truth. Keep it.

The point of comparison is simple and easily understood by the youths and even city people. If they don't know this basic Botany, then tell it to them. In Grand Mound, Iowa, they learn about these things early. When you start to see leaves and buds in the springtime, or when you see the planters in the field, then you know that summer is coming soon.

31. So also, “ὅταν ἴδητε ταῦτα γινόμενα – when you see these things come to pass,” you will know that the Last Day comes next and soon. The “these things” refer to all the things He has been talking about since the original question about times and signs, normal and supernatural. It's all very orderly, and it's laid out in a way that is very easy to understand.

32. This maybe not so much, “οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται – this generation will not have passed until all things have taken place.” Every single translation has “generations” passing, which at face value means that these things will happen within the next twenty or thirty years. The normal things did, but the supernatural clearly not.

That's the primary meaning of this double entendre. The other meaning is not uncommon in the NT, when Jesus talks – for example – about “this wicked generation,” taking “generation” to mean “this kind of people,” who are always going to be there. Going back to the original question, there will always be people who want to know about the timing.

That noun “γενεά.” comes from the verb “γίνομαι,” the common word for coming into being; used to talk about birth and being born. In the NT, the noun is very seldom used to describe what we would call a “generation.” The tertiary meaning at biblehub is “the whole multitude of men living at the same time,” and some of the NT examples given are sketchy.

The verb “pass away” is an aorist subjunctive, with the focus on the passing. The subjunctive is used to describe “acts that pertain to the future and/or those about which there is some uncertainty.” To be sure, the main area of uncertainty here is the timing of this thing; still back to the original question put forth to Him about times and signs.

Given what He has just said about what will happen in Jerusalem, the word we're looking for here is “race,” i.e., the Jewish people, and the meaning is that they will endure as a people until the end. As a matter of fact, the Jews have proven to be particularly genocide resilient, having avoided even a very concerted attempt just a few generations ago.

That can't be said for all ethnic groups. It can't even be said for the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, who were exterminated by the Assyrians and no longer exist. For more on that, begin with https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Extinct_ethnic_groups. And while we're on the subject, we assimilated American Indians and gave them land to live on.

33. About things that pass, or not, “ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονται – heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away.” The verb for “pass away” was an aorist subjunctive. Here that same verb is a future tense, twice; and indeed the Bible is consistent about the coming destruction of creation by fire. Just as consistent, The Word is from eternity, and will continue into eternity, using the same form of the same verb, and emphatically, using the double negative. Genesis and John tell us that The Word has been there always, and his visions of heaven indicate that it will continue always. The idea that there would be no words in heaven is sort of unthinkable.

In the beginning, we look at Genesis, where the spoken Word is used to create. We look at the here and now, where the spoken Word and the Word attached to elements creates new life and sustains that new life. By the Word of God, the fire will destroy, and we can well imagine the “new heavens and new earth” being created by that same creative Word.

34. Knowing all these things, He commands or invites them, “Προσέχετε δὲ ἑαυτοῖς μή ποτε βαρηθῶσιν ὑμῶν αἱ καρδίαι – be attentive to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down.” The command is not singular – given to individuals, but it is plural, given to all. He is here speaking to the collective Church throughout the ages, looking out for self.

Our collective heart can be weighed down by any of any of a number of things, or a combination. He specifies “ἐν κραυγῇ καὶ μέθῃ καὶ μερίμναις βιωτικαῖς, καὶ ἐπιστῇ ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς αἰφνίδιος ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη – by a hangover, drunkenness and the anxieties of this life and that day should come upon you suddenly” or unforeseen. You have been forewarned.

Hangover and drunkenness are pretty basic distractions; how many Sunday morning church services have been missed due to of Saturday night partying? Next distraction; “μερίμναις” means to be pulled in different directions, and “βιωτικαῖς” is a compound word meaning the plethora of ordinary things in life and living that bring with them that sort of pulling.

35. The animal is always surprised when the trap goes off. The mice out in the garage, they be enjoying their chunky peanut butter, and then – they don't know what hit them. The rabbit in the snare or the bird lured into the cage, they are going about their business, eating and drinking, but not marrying and giving in marriage...and then they're dead.

That's what it's going to be like for unbelievers; “ὥς παγίς· ἐπεισελεύσεται γὰρ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ πρόσωπον πάσης τῆς γῆς – for like a snare it will come upon all those

dwelling upon all the face of the earth.” That word “παγίς” is used only five times in the NT, and it means primarily a snare used to catch birds. But God does not trap believers.

We note the piling on of words to tell us that it’s going to be very universal, this judgment. That also is consistent with the rest of the Bible; you can run, but you can’t hide, and then you can’t even run. The verb “κάθημαι” means to sit, and we might almost render this “sitting around.” The idiom “face of the earth” indicates the all-encompassing nature of it.

36. The final command or invitation to “ἀγρυπνεῖτε δὲ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ - stay awake in every season.” The KJV has “watch,” and many LBT keep that, but a few get it right. It’s about not falling asleep, spiritually speaking. We render “καιρῷ” as “season” for lack of a better term; it simply means to stay awake during all times and circumstances; see above.

While you are awake, you should be “δεόμενοι ἵνα κατισχύσητε ἐκφυγεῖν ταῦτα πάντα τὰ μέλλοντα γίνεσθαι – praying, that you get the upper hand to escape all these things that are going to take place.” To escape is the opposite of being trapped or captured. These are all plurals, again indicating that this continues to be the collective effort of the Church.

If you are successful in doing that, you will also be able “καὶ σταθῆναι ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου – and to stand in front of the Son of Man.” This is the picture of one who has been faithful unto death, who is going to receive the crown of life, and to hear the words “well done, good and faithful servant. Enter...” and isn’t that what we live for?

